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ABSTRACT

This digest, based on a full report of the same title, provides an examination of the improvement of college teaching and argues for the central involvement of faculty themselves in collaborative peer review and looks at some central issues and challenges to implementation. Since summative evaluation involved in tenure and promotion decisions cannot be an effective tool for instructional improvement, formative evaluation, assessment specifically designed to improve teaching, should be put into place alongside but apart from summative evaluation. Collaborative peer review is well suited to the formative evaluation task. Faculty can evaluate their colleagues' performance pre-interaction, at delivery, and post-interaction. They can also assess interrelationships among these stages and goals and objectives, methods and materials, and feedback. Methods can include direct classroom observation, videotaping of classes, evaluation of course materials, assessment of instructor evaluation of the academic work of students, and analysis of teaching portfolios. Other formats and combinations of methods have been advocated. With improved processes, faculty may be more willing to participate in peer review. Teaching improvement through peer review can come about in a way that significantly enriches individual faculty members and their institutional academic community. Nine specific recommendations from a study of formative peer evaluation are included. (Contains 8 references.) (JB)

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Collaborative Peer Review
The Role of Faculty in Improving College Teaching

Larry Keig and Michael D. Waggoner

Teaching is "the business of the business--the activity that is central to all colleges and universities" (Pew Higher Education Research Program 1989, p. 1). But teaching is not always taken seriously and too often is relegated to a position below that of other professional activities. While there unquestionably is superior teaching in the academy, nearly everyone agrees that it could be improved significantly and that the teaching of even the best faculty could be strengthened.

What Arguments Can Be Made for Implementing Improvement Programs?

For decades, academicians have assumed, usually erroneously, that summative evaluation--decision making with respect to reappointment, promotion, tenure, and compensation--is also a means by which instructional improvement can be facilitated. In practice, summative evaluation rarely provides sufficient information to faculty for improving teaching. In recent years, in fact, time-honored practices of faculty evaluation have been rather harshly criticized.

In response to this criticism, scholars have recommended that formative evaluation--assessment specifically designed to improve teaching--be put into place alongside, but apart from, summative evaluation. Other scholars have suggested that formative peer evaluation, a process in which faculty work collaboratively to assess each others' teaching and to assist one another in efforts to strengthen teaching, be developed and implemented.

Collaborative peer review probably should include opportunities for faculty to learn how to teach more effectively, to practice new teaching techniques and approaches, to get regular feedback on their classroom performance, and to receive coaching from colleagues (Menges 1985). The thrust, thus, is developmental rather than not judgmental.

What Assessment Methods Should Be Used by Faculty for the Purpose of Instructional Improvement?

A number of methods have been employed in formative peer evaluation. They include direct classroom observation, videotaping of classes, evaluation of course materials, an assessment of instructor evaluation of the academic work of students, and analysis of teaching portfolios. Hart has identified six instructional events occurring during delivery that should be critiqued by knowledgeable colleagues:

1. The place where and the time when classes are taught and other physical factors affecting delivery;
2. The procedures used by the teacher in conducting the class;
3. The teacher's use of language to inform, explain, persuade, and motivate, and the language students use in responding and reacting to the teacher;
4. The roles played by teacher and students as they interact;
5. The relationship of what is occurring in a particular class to other classes, disciplines, and the curriculum in general; and
6. The outcomes of teaching, as reflected in student learning (1987).

Videotaping of classes should be employed for its unique potential in improving teaching: validating feedback from other sources (Perlberg 1983), documenting and preserving the strengths of teachers, identifying weaknesses, and comparing teaching at different points in teachers' careers (Lichty and Peterson 1979). In formative peer evaluation, video playback/feedback should be considered more than an alternative to classroom observation.

Informed peers are ideally suited to assess colleagues' course materials and evaluation of students' academic work. As McCarthey and Peterson suggest, these materials "provide an overview of the curriculum taught, information about teaching strategies, and details about assignments given. Materials can indicate types of communication with students . . . the kind of management system used, and resources provided to students. . . . There is a plausible logical connection between quality materials and quality classroom performance for many, but not all teachers" (1988, p. 261). Cohen and McKeachie's classification cited earlier is especially instructive in describing what materials faculty could examine and how to complete what otherwise might be a daunting task (1980).

Several program examples in which formative peer evaluation has been employed are described in some detail in the text. Readers are urged to consider each program carefully, for each has its worthy elements.

What Factors Can Detract from Faculty Members' Willingness to Participate in Programs Designed to Improve Teaching?

On the basis of the arguments presented thus far, it would appear that formative peer evaluation should be embraced for the betterment of the academy. We know, however, that use of this form of instructional improvement activity has been negligible. A number of reasons have been cited for the unwillingness of faculty to participate in the various methods of formative colleague assessment.

The disincentives include faculty attitudes toward academic freedom; their perceptions of the representativeness,

accuracy, and typicality of what is evaluated; their conception of the objectivity of those who conduct the assessment; and their values with respect to the institution's rewards and incentives. Ways must be found to convince faculty that what they may consider disincentives can be opportunities for professional development. For example, having classes observed and materials assessed by colleagues for the purpose of instructional improvement no more should be considered a threat to academic freedom than would having colleagues critique a proposed manuscript for publication. And including videotaping of classes and peer review of course materials and of instructor evaluations of students' academic work, in addition to classroom observation, should make the process more credible to the faculty.

What Can Be Done to Encourage Faculty to Participate in the Programming?

Scholars insist there are several ways of enhancing the process that will improve the likelihood faculty will develop and take part in formative peer evaluation. Besides convincing faculty that the "disincentives" can be opportunities rather than liabilities, the process might be enhanced by involving the faculty in the design and implementation of the program, in the establishment of standards of effective teaching upon which performance will be assessed, in programs that provide training in methods of supervision and communication, and in the interpretation and integration of data provided by students, administrators, and colleagues, as well as faculty members' self-assessment.

How Can Faculty, Students, and Colleges and Universities Benefit from Formative Peer Evaluation of Teaching?

Scholars have suggested that a number of personal and institutional benefits might be realized from faculty participation in the formative peer evaluation of teaching. Researchers have found not only *that* but *how* teaching improves when faculty avail themselves of programs in which they work collaboratively to improve teaching. After taking part in such programs.

Studies also appear to show that faculty morale and collegiality improve when faculty are involved in formative peer evaluation. While student learning may improve when faculty take part in such programs, that is a difficult claim to substantiate, since many variables besides teaching affect student learning. At this time, there is not enough evidence to suggest that the tenure status of junior faculty is enhanced when they have participated in formative peer evaluation.

What Recommendations Emerge From a Study of Formative Peer Evaluation?

1. Faculty evaluation should include largely separate formative and summative tracks.
2. Formative evaluation should include nonjudgmental descriptions of faculty members' teaching by colleagues, administrators, and, where available, teaching consultants as well as students.
3. Faculty should be encouraged to take part in yearlong programs of formative peer evaluation of teaching every few years.
4. Faculty should take leadership in the design and implementation of programs of formative evaluation of teaching.
5. Faculty should be provided opportunities for training in the skills needed to conduct formative peer evaluation.
6. The involvement of the faculty in the formative evaluation of teaching should be guided by expertise in appropriate areas of the knowledge base of teaching.
7. Formative peer evaluation should include observation, videotaping, evaluation of materials, assessment of instructor evaluations of the students, and analysis of teaching portfolios.
8. Institutional rewards and incentives should be structured to demonstrate to faculty that participation in formative peer evaluation of teaching truly is valued.
9. Research should proceed along several potentially lucrative lines: the interaction of variables in specific institutional contexts; the tie between participation in formative peer evaluation and motivational theory; documentation and reporting experiences with formative peer assessment; and rigorous empirical and ethnographic study of programs currently in place.

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